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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that because there is no meaningful distinction between care and education for young children, the early childhood field should be renamed "early childhood educare." The concept of educare recognizes that children's thinking develops through joint interactions with others in responsive social contexts. The predominant theoretical framework for early childhood philosophy and curriculum has been Piaget's theory. In this theory, development determines cognitive competence and influences what children are capable of learning. On the other hand, Vygotsky saw learning as driving development and the development of thinking as a shared process rather than an individual one. Because Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the social and cultural context of children's thinking, it should be applied to the responsive social contexts provided in early childhood educare. In a Vygotskian framework, children are capable of far more competent performance when they have assistance from adults or more capable peers in their zone of proximal development so adults take a reactive and participatory role. Teachers and peer tutors have a highly interactive role, and children learn through participating and sharing another person's frame of reference. This theoretical framework challenges a laissez-faire free play curriculum and suggests that teachers need to take an active role in stimulating learning. A list of about 50 references is included. (MM)

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Early Childhood Educare:

Seeking a theoretical framework in Vygotsky's work [1]

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[1] The ideas presented in this paper are explored in more detail in the 1993 third edition of Anne Smith's book entitled *Understanding Children's Development: A New Zealand Perspective*, Wellington: Bridget Williams Books.

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Abstract

This paper argues that there is no meaningful distinction between care and education for young children so that the early childhood field should be renamed early childhood educare. The predominant theoretical framework for early childhood philosophy and curriculum has been Piaget's theory. Piaget's theory describes development as determining current cognitive competence and influencing what children are capable of learning. Children are seen as natural scientists who investigate the world and thereby broaden their understanding. Teachers are expected to stand back and provide resources for children's autonomous learning but not to interfere with it. The paper argues that Vygotsky's theory as applied to the responsive social contexts provided in early childhood educare should be given more consideration because it gives more attention to the importance of the social and cultural context on children's thinking than Piaget. Vygotsky saw learning as driving development and the development of thinking as a shared process rather than an individual one. Children are capable of far more competent performance when they have assistance from adults in their zone of proximal development so adults take a reactive and participatory role. The paper discusses the role of language, the internalisation of interpersonal processes, the importance of intersubjectivity, the need for scaffolding in the zone of proximal development, and the role of both adult and peer tutors according to the author's interpretation of Vygotsky's theory.

The aim of this paper is to seek a theoretical base for the concept of early childhood *educare* in the work of Vygotsky and neo-Vygotskians. I will argue that the early childhood field should be renamed "educare" and that Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is a more appropriate theoretical framework for the field than the current predominantly Piagetian view. Vygotsky's theory provides an alternative perspective which is particularly relevant to an integrated educare approach to the field of early childhood. I believe that is has value because it suggests that children's intellectual development has its origins in their experience in social contexts. This relates to the concept of educare, which recognised that children's thinking develops through joint interactions with others in responsive social contexts. In my view the early childhood field needs to recognise the quiet revolution which has been taking place in developmental psychology with the rediscovery and reinterpretation of Vygotsky's theory (Bruner & Haste, 1987; Moll, 1990; Wertsch, 1985; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992; Wertsch, 1991; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Early Childhood Educare

Early childhood educare is not a new concept. It has been used in the United States (Caldwell, 1991), in the United Kingdom (Calder, 1990; David, 1990) in New Zealand (Smith, 1987; Smith & Swain, 1988; Smith, 1988) and probably elsewhere. The concept is an important one in early childhood because it challenges the view that education and care are separable components of early childhood environments (either in homes or centres). Care, with its connotations of custodial physical caregiving, watching over and affection, has in the past been thought to be quite different from education, which involves planned educational activities designed to enhance children's learning. The term educare was coined in

recognition that for young children there can be no meaningful distinction between care and education. Small children do not easily learn in environments where their physical and emotional well being is not nurtured. Warm, secure and responsive human environments also promote learning and development. Cold, restrictive and unsafe environments retard them. A New Zealand government report in 1980 said:

> Whatever is provided for young children is in one sense care, and in another sense education. The two things in relation to the young child cannot be easily distinguished. Once cannot provide care for young children without their learning ideas, habits and attitudes, nor can one educate them without at the same time providing them with care (State Services Commission Report, 1980, pp3-4).

Educare is provided in caring, responsive social contexts where adult-child and child-child interactions and opportunities for play and exploration promote children's social and intellectual development. Educare services are organised, supervised programmes with social and educational goals for children in the temporary absence of their parents.

Unfortunately the false and misleading dichotomy between education and care has been institutionalised in the early childhood education systems of many countries into two separately funded and administered services which are assumed to provide care or education. Childcare centres (day care, day nurseries etc) which care for children from birth until school age, usually on an all day basis, are assumed to provide care, while preschool centres (kindergartens, nursery schools etc) which normally provide sessional programmes for 3 and 4 year-olds are assumed to provide education. Lower status and recognition is usually attached to the so-called care services than to the so-called education services. The educational and training requirements of adults who work in the care services are often lower than for adults who work in the education services. Moreover it is not uncommon for governments to be more prepared to fund education services than care services. "Normal"

parents are expected to fund their own care services. Only in the case of "agency problems" like low income, abuse, neglect or parental ill health is it considered appropriate for governments to fund care services in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. Education, moreover, is more likely to be recognised as a public good since it is assumed to promote achievement, while care is seen as a private need for parents during their absence at work.

Caldwell (1991) has pointed out that the number of hours and the age of children attending a programme is irrelevant to the quality of educare they experience. Good quality programmes, regardless of the age or the hours of attendance of children, will provide educare. She urges:

> acceptance of the concept that early childhood education (or preschool education) and child care (or day care) are really one and the same essential service operated for different lengths of time (Caldwell, 1991, p.204).

The Current Predominant Theoretical Framework for Early Childhood Education

Since the nineteen sixties early childhood philosophy and curriculum has been strongly influenced by developmental psychology (Roopnarine & Johnson, 1987; Singer, 1992). The Head Start movement in the United States gave psychologists a unique chance to put their theories into practice. Piaget's theories were made popular by the work of Hunt (1961) and adapted as the basis for many model early childhood programmes (Erschler, McAllister & Saunders, 1977; Furth & Wachs, 1974; Forman & Hill, 1980; Kamii & DeVries, 1978; Copple, Sigel & Saunders, 1979; Hohmann, Banet & Weikart, 1979). Roopnarine & Johnson (1987)'s comprehensive survey of the theoretical basis for early childhood education programmes has multiple references to Piaget (as well as to many other theorists such as Erikson and Montessori) but Vygotsky does not even appear in the index. Perusal of recent years of a British early childhood journal revealed many references to Piaget (eg Allen, 1988;

Denham, 1991; Heninger, 1991; Lister & Atha, 1985; Vianello & Marin, 1989) admittedly some of them critical, but very few to Vygotsky.

My argument is that the current predominant theoretical framework for early childhood programmes is too heavily influenced by Piaget, without acknowledgement of the widespread critique of Piaget amongst developmental psychologists (Bruner & Haste, 1987; Donaldson, 1978; Ingleby, 1986; Light, 1986; Morss, 1991) or the upsurge of interest in Vygotsky's ideas (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). Denham (1991) points out that:

> Often when one considers the developmental perspective on thinking, the first name which comes to mind is that of Piaget (1991, p35).

Denham says that since Piaget's theory is not a theory of teaching, educators must derive their own implications from his theory. Indeed there have been many different interpretations of how Piaget should be applied to education. One not uncommon Piaget derived view is that children progress through various stages of development, which determine their current levels of skills and competence. Education is then planned according to these expected developmental levels and children who have reached them are considered ready to learn. One example of this approach was seen in the design of a new mathematics curriculum for junior classes in New Zealand (Beginning School Mathematics) where numbers greater than nine were not introduced until after the first two years at school since children younger than this were thought to be incapable of dealing with large numbers (Young-Loveridge, 1989).

Another example of the application of Piaget's views (as interpreted by Kamii) to the mathematics curriculum in early childhood education classrooms is Mannigel's (1988) paper. Mannigel cites Piaget's constructivism to argue that children cannot be taught number concepts since they must construct them through their own mental activity. Mannigel advises

teachers to stand back and intervene as little as possible in the classroom and to let children find their own answers to mathematical questions. Teachers are told to "have faith in children's own developmental pace" (Mannigel, p5). Children should be encouraged to be autonomous and make decisions for themselves. They should not "simply internalise knowledge that is transmitted from others" (p4). Young-Loveridge (1988) has roundly criticised Mannigel's view of mathematics learning on the basis that a more reactive approach by adults is more likely to enhance mathematics learning. Young-Loveridge argues that sitting back and waiting for children to discover mathematics on their own does not enhance number skill and that what parents and other adults do in informal learning contexts has a profound effect on the development of children's number understanding.

Piagetian theory is often the basis for a free play curriculum where children make the choices and do the activities with the teacher intervening as little as possible, acting as a resource for the child rather than participating jointly. David Wood describes the Piagetian view and its implications:

> Piaget's child is an epistemologist; a natural seeker after, and architect of, his own understanding. He learns largely through his own activity in the world. He constructs progressively more powerful, abstract and integrated systems of knowing by discovering how his actions affect reality. All a teacher can do is facilitate that understanding by providing appropriate materials and contexts for the child's actions and by helping the child to discover inconsistencies in his own views... There is no point and may even be harm in confronting the child with hypotheses, demonstrations or explanations that are not 'natural' to his stage of development (Wood, 1986, p195).

A Piagetian view of development suggests that development is essentially an individualistic process. The child is viewed as an active but isolated scientist, trying to understand the world through his/her existing cognitive structures and his/her interactions with the human and physical environment (Bruner & Haste, 1987). Piaget's descriptions of the operational competencies of children have been criticised for underestimating their

competence and ignoring the human context of the problems (Bruner & Haste, 1987; Donaldson, 1978; Hughes, 1986) but Piaget's description of the inexorable development of children's thinking towards an ideal logical level of cognitive development is the subject of even more fundamental criticism (Light, 1986; Morss, 1991). The idea that thinking emerges from inside the child's head with little consideration given to the influence of social context on competence is criticised. According to Morss:

> .. Piaget's stage theory of cognitive development is very badly mistaken. Children are not working their way through a fixed sequence of mental states, finally reaching the state we call adult thinking. This is simply an adult-centred view of childhood. Rather, children are dealing with the world that faces them in the best way they can, employing different strategies for interacting with and understanding the world as seems appropriate. Cognitive development is something adults see, it is not something children experience or which is really there. The stages of cognitive development are in the heads of adults, not in the heads of children (1991, p 21).

An Alternative Theoretical Framework for Early Childhood Educare

Vygotsky sociocultural account of development is in sharp contrast to Piaget's because of its rejection of the primacy of individual development. He viewed mind as extending beyond the skin and functions like cognition and memory as not restricted to individuals (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). Vygotsky thought that mind was inherently dependent on cultural tools or mediated means such as language. Mediated means link the culture to the individual so that while we use the words of our culture we interpret them in an uniquely individual way (Wertsch, 1992).

Vygotsky (1978) also viewed the traditional idea that a child's mind contains all its future developments in a complete form awaiting the proper moment to emerge, as quite mistaken. He believed that instead of matching teaching to existing development, teaching had to proceed ahead of development in order to awaken those functions in the process of

maturing. He believed that children grow into the intellectual life of those around them. Learning cannot be separated from development and "good learning" is in advance of development. Children advance to higher stages of development by being stimulated and guided at the outside limits of their skill by others. Child development is the result of children's competence being challenged and extended with help. The help is gradually withdrawn and the child becomes able to perform more and more on his/her own.

Language and the Internalisation of Interpersonal Processes

One of Vygotsky's most important contributions is the idea of the internalisation of interpersonal processes. He said that:

> Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (*interpsychological*), and then *inside* the child (*intrapsychological*) (Vygotsky, 1978, p57).

Language is central to children's development. Children first use language to communicate with other people, but then their language is converted into internal speech or thought which is used for self regulation. Speech is an essential tool to allow children to plan and carry out actions, deal with things and control their own behaviour. It is the basis of the development of consciousness. As Tharp and Gallimore say:

> Language appears to be like Mercury, the messenger who carries content from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane, a messenger with unique gifts for translation from one plane to the other. What is spoken to the child is later said by the child to the self, and later is abbreviated and transformed into the silent speech of the child's thought (p 44).

Vygotsky's believed that through the use of language and communication children's thinking developed. Because they are embedded in society children can absorb and develop language and cultural understandings of that society. For Vygotsky language and culture are

intricately related since language is the means of entry into a culture. Interactions in a social context are the driving force for language development but with internalisation language serves as a means of conscious control and thought. Bruner explains well the link between language and culture in Vygotsky's theory:

> ...aspirant members of a culture learn from their tutors, the vicars of their culture, how to understand the world. That world is a symbolic world in the sense that it consists of conceptually organized, rule-bound beliefs systems about what exists, about how to get to goals, about what it is to be valued. There is no way, none, in which the human being could possibly master that world without the aid and assistance of others for, in fact, that world *is* others (Bruner, 1985, p32).

Vygotsky (1962, 1978) emphasised the link between language, meaning and thought. He believed that each word was a concept and that the meaning of words represents a close amalgam between thought and language. He saw the development of meaning as an evolutionary process in children's development. Word meaning is a basic unit for understanding thinking because it is both necessary for communication and for consciousness. Word meanings develop in the process of discourse over joint activity and then are internalised to become self-directing speech and thought.

Negotiation of meaning takes place between conversational partners and shared language emerges out of communicative talk. The hearer assumes that the speaker is talking sense and tries to infer the sense of what is being said. The speaker monitors what she is saying to fit the listener's outlook and existing knowledge (Rommetveit,1985). In "motherese" (or baby talk) the adult exaggerates and stresses words and sentences, uses simple vocabulary, emphasises the "here and now", simplifies syntax and uses frequent repetitions. It illustrates how adults and older children are skilled in tailoring their speech to fit the needs of the young child. The less skilled partner in the conversation gradually assumes more responsibility for what is being referred to. Bruner says that once meanings are shared

it is possible to talk about what is known by speaker and listener and then there is the possibility of going beyond the known to the zone of the unknown.

The internalisation process is a gradual one. Children come to use language as a tool to help them solve problems and plan activities. They go through a stage in the pre and early school years of talking to themselves out loud while they solve concrete problems. Piaget called this external speech egocentric speech, but Vygotsky saw it as a stage in the transfer of social collaborative forms of speech into speech for problem solving and thinking. While Piaget thought that it disappeared, Vygotsky thought that it became internalised. Vygotsky saw that language opened up all sorts of possibilities for controlling behaviour, for example behaviour becomes much less impulsive once children acquire language.

The Zone of Proximal Development

Vygotsky showed that children could perform much more skilfully together with others than they could alone. He said that until children have acquired competence in developing skills, they require help and supervision. Vygotsky's concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development* is a key one in applying his theory to education.

> We propose that an essential feature of learning is that it creates the *zone of proximal development*; that is, learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when a child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent developmental achievement (Vygotsky, 1978, p90).

Vygotsky made a distinction between the actual developmental level of the child and the zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is:

> ..the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (1978, p86).

Scaffolding is a metaphor for another concept which comes out of Vygotsky's theory, though he never used the term himself. It refers to the guidance and interactional support given by a tutor in the zone of proximal development. Bruner and his colleagues (Wood, Bruner and Ross, 1976) were the first to use the term. Bruner (1985) explains scaffolding as permitting children to do as much as they can by themselves while what they cannot do is filled in by the mother (or other tutor)'s activities. There are differences in the quantity and quality of scaffolding support given to children (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). The quantity issue refers to how high the scaffold is, at what level and how long it is kept in place, while the quality issue is concerned with the different ways in which help is offered, through directing attention, modelling, asking questions or giving encouragement for example. Ideally children, initially spectators, becomes participants and with the support of an adult learn the rules, grasp the meanings and become able to provide assistance to themselves and control their own behaviour. In the process of learning the tutor provides "a vicarious form of consciousness" (Bruner, 1985) which children take over for themselves after the task has been mastered. Children do not passively absorb the strategies of the adult. They take an active inventive role and reconstruct the task through their own understanding. This process has been called "guided reinvention" by Tharp and Gallimore (1988).

The Importance of a Shared Frame of Reference

The starting point of learning in the Vygotskian model is *intersubjectivity* so that tutor and learner need to have a shared understanding of the purposes, goals, tools and contexts of the task (McNaughton, 1991) since dialogue is the starting point of thought. When intersubjectivity is achieved the child redefines a problem situation in terms of an adult perspective. Once the child understands and shares an adult's perspective responsibility can

be gradually transferred to the child (Diaz, Neal and Amaya-Williams, 1990). It is impossible for a tutor to be effective without considering the child's interests, knowledge and point of view. As McNaughton says:

> A failure to establish intersubjectivity poses great difficulties for effective learning. Children and teachers can have very different understandings of what learning to read entails, or how people should talk together (p140).

When tutor and learner achieve intersubjectivity the tutor and learner do not misunderstand each other and contribute reciprocally to the interaction so that children can gradually become the initiators. Intersubjectivity is achieved through shared meaning for signs and symbols which develops in the context of interaction over joint activity. It is only through communication within a shared frame of reference that children can internalise and construct their own understandings. Piaget saw understanding arising out of individual actions whereas Vygotsky saw it as arising out of shared actions. Wood says that the child develops "concepts that are jointly constructed through interaction with those who already embody them" (1986, p195).

The informal learning that goes on in families all the time illustrates well the importance of intersubjectivity. Glynn talks about how his granddaughter, Lexie, got her first lesson in writing from her parents. Lexie's mother, Dof, is writing to her parents, who are overseas and explains this to two year-old Lexie.

> "Write Koro! Write Koro!" exclaims Lexie. Her meaning is clear. Just to make it even clearer, she tugs at the page her mother is writing on and reaches for the pen. So strongly does Lexie want to write that Dof is forced to find her a piece of paper and a crayon. "There you go. You can write a letter to Koro too." says Dof. Lexie busies herself, standing up making marks on her paper which is on a chair next to her mother who is sitting on the couch. She looks back and forth from her paper to her mother's. "Love Koro! Love Koro!" she shrieks delightedly. "Good girl! You're telling Koro you love him!" says Dof... "Lexie.... loves..... Koro...." Dof intones slowly as she writes this message under the marks Lexie has made. Lexie smiles

> broadly, snatches up the paper and runs about the house with it, shouting: "Write Koro! Write Koro! Lexie write Koro!" (Glynn, 1992, p3).

Lexie acquires an initial understanding of how writing works in this episode through the scaffolding actions of her mother in a joint activity. She learns the link between speaking and writing and that making marks on paper can send messages to people. This is part of the long process of negotiating the meanings of language which parents carry on with their children from birth.

Dorothy White's (1954) reading diary of the books she read to her daughter provide many examples how the world of books is transmitted from mother to child. Here is a diary entry about Carol, aged two being read a story called *A Book for Baby*:

> Carol could not understand "Here I am. Alan Richard is my name." She only understands that when I say "I", I mean myself; and when she says "I" she means herself. She cannot grasp an "I" referring to a third party, the boy in the book. Carol sees this as, "Here is a little boy. This is his Daddy". The text therefore requires a constant modification.

White shows here how a mother can provide sensitive guidance to her child to help her understand a story because she so well interprets the child's frame of reference. She can easily adjust the meanings of the story so that they can be understood by the child. White describes how later on the book became a favourite and Carol would spend a long time looking at it on her own.

Play

Vygotsky (1978) believed that the opportunity to engage in imaginary situations was very valuable because for the first time the child's thinking could be liberated from situational constraints which provides the basis for the development of higher abstract thought. The child becomes able to act independently of his/her perceptions in play situations. Actions are

subordinate to meanings rather than the reverse. Play is important in the development of consciousness since it enables a child to develop rules based on ideas and meanings and not on objects themselves. Children become able to detach meanings from the real concrete situation in which they are usually embedded. Vygotsky thought that play created a zone of proximal development for the child and that in play s/he always acted beyond his/her average age "as if he were a head taller than himself" (p102).

Play should be encouraged from a Vygotskian perspective, because he saw it as a highly purposeful activity which allowed the development of representational thought. Imaginative play is a crucial part of any early childhood curriculum but it needs to be supplemented by considerable experience of intensive teaching.

The Role of the Teacher

The Vygotskian child learns through working in his/her zone of proximal development with others. Scaffolding is sensitively tuned to what the child presently understands, focusing on getting him to concentrate on what s/he can manage, while the tutor fills in the parts that the child cannot do. As the child takes over more of the task help is gradually withdrawn.

Teachers have a highly interactive role in a Vygotskian framework. Children's development is static unless they are able to work in their zone of proximal development. Teaching does not wait upon development but propels it. Teachers need to know learners well so that they can provide the right level of guidance, and gradually withdraw it as the child comes to understand and perform the task alone. Teachers cannot leave children to discover the world alone in "free play" if this is interpreted to mean non participation in the child's activities. It is through participating and sharing another's frame of reference that children learn.

Teachers need to have time for interaction and conversation with children in one-to-one situations and relatively small groups. They also need the opportunity to observe children so that they can see how to adjust their support to the child's current level of understanding. In order to acquire intersubjectivity they have to be able to see things from the child's point of view and understand the meanings which come from the background of family and culture.

It is possible for teachers to work in the zone of proximal development even when they are working with a group. McDonald and Kidman's (1991) study of New Zealand junior school classrooms shows how children create and negotiate the meaning of their learning environment. This transcript of a story reading session illustrates the skilled scaffolding provided by the teacher in the form of questions drawing attention to the meaning of the story, and how to use cues in pictures and text. The children are supplying their own unique contributions from their varying experiences.

Teacher: (holds the book up to the children so they can see the text). He's probably meowing quite loudly. How would I guess that?

Gemma: Because its got, because its got... excremation...

Sally: Extremation.

Sue: Extremation marks.

Teacher: Oh, good on you. The exclamation marks. (Teacher shows children the picture that accompanies the text)

Teacher: Who do you think this is, Nicole? This lady here?

Nicole: Mummy

Teacher: It's mum! Do you think she will feed the cat? Do you think she will, Jackie?

Jackie: No. Let's find out. (Teacher and children read the text in unison)

John: Hey - there's talking marks?

Teacher: Why are there talking marks?

John: 'Cause the cat's going 'meow, meow,meow.'

Teacher: No, where mum's talking, they've got to be talking marks... Who's this man going to be? (Shows the picture page to the children).

Jan: Grand-dad

Teacher: Grand-dad? Could be.

Simon: Grand-pop?

George: Uncle

Teacher: What makes you think it's uncle, George?

George: Because I've heard the story before.

It is important for teachers, particularly early childhood teachers, to be able to participate in such shared contexts with children. Children will not be able to advance in their zone of proximal development unless they have the opportunity to share in joint interactions with a teacher who is sensitive to their changing knowledge and able to set them on an independent learning path. In the Vygotskyian classroom the teacher does not wander around the room scanning children's activities and making the occasional comment or question directed at a child. She participates actively in tasks with children on a sustained basis, especially in the initial stages of learning.

Peer Tutoring and Learning

It is not always necessary for an adult to be the person who encourages learning in the zone of proximal development. Forman and Cazden (1985) show that children can provide scaffolding for each other very effectively in peer tutoring situations. Sometimes one child knows more than the others and acts as the tutor. Children of equal competence can, however, also collaborate in a reciprocal way so that they alternate roles such as questioner, model (showing how something works), experimenter or critic while the other can take the

role of listener, responder, or observer. Forman and Cazden quote the work of one of Vygotsky's pupils, Levina, who believed that a peer tutor benefitted from explaining something to her peers. In the process of verbally labelling something so that it is comprehensible to another person one clarifies it for oneself, so the tutoring process also benefits from this process. Forman and Cazden suggest that peer tutoring and collaboration can be an intermediate step between being directed by the speech of another and directing one's own mental processes via inner speech.

Dunn (1987) shows how children learn things about emotions in the context of family disputes and in shared games with siblings. Older siblings can play a role in helping younger siblings understand feelings and learn themselves in the process. Older siblings are skilful in grasping the feelings and capabilities of their baby siblings and able to interpret them to the world. One example is where 3 year-old Bruce talks about his baby brother who is playing with a balloon. "He going to pop it in a minute. And he'll cry. And he'll be frightened of me too". He shows his skill in "reading" the babies reactions and his shared framework of understanding.

For young children adults may at first need to help children how to acquire intersubjectivity or interpret the feelings of others. Foote (1992) gives some examples of concern for others feelings developing in two-year olds in a childcare centre. In these exchanges the teacher mediates children's concern for their peers.

Child 1:	"Why Mary not happy?"
Teacher:	"I think Mary - are you happy this morning Mary? Ask her (to child 1).
Child 2:	"Why Jane crying? Why Jane crying? What is Jane crying for?"
Teacher:	"I think that she is a little bit shy about coming to our room. I think she doesn't want to come into the toddlers room . We are bringing her in for a visit. I think she will like it."
Child 2:	"Why's that?"
Teacher:	"Because pretty soon Jane will be a toddler too."

This observation of three year-olds playing together provides another illustration of the way that even young children can provide sensitive scaffolding for each other's learning.

> Two three year-old boys are sitting on the floor playing side by side with a plastic construction toy. Michael has made what looks like a fire engine. He is pushing his vehicle back and forth and going "Brrum, brrum". Jake is still trying to assemble his vehicle and is having trouble getting the wheels and the ladder attached. He intently struggles to attach these parts. Michael stops pushing his vehicle and looks at Jake. He says: "You have to put it in front like mine". He holds up his vehicle and points to where he has attached the ladder. He picks up Jake's piece and points to where it should slot in and says "You do it that way." Jake continues trying unsuccessfully to join the piece on. Michael still watching says: "Put it on sideways like mine". Jake tries to comply and says "This way?" while still manipulating the plastic pieces. Michael says "Shall I hold it?" Jake still tries to get the piece on. He shakes his head and says "It's not going on." He slams the pieces down on the floor in frustration. He says: "I've finished." Michael says "What's the matter?" He takes the pieces from Jake and attaches them saying "You just put it up there like that." Michael hands the completed vehicle to Jake. Jake takes it contentedly and pushes it back and forth going "Brrum, brrum" (extract from transcript of a video made in a childcare centre, 1992).

Conclusions

The field of early childhood educare can benefit from a fresh look at the theoretical perspective provided by Vygotsky's work. Piaget's theory, while providing a useful emphasis on the need for children to construct their own understanding of the world, underemphasises the importance of the cultural and social context of learning in helping children to conceptualise that world. Vygotsky's theory suggests that the origins of thinking are deeply embedded in the fabric of social interaction. Thinking is influenced not only by the immediate social situation but by the cultural meanings and understandings inherent in the language. Social interchange between people is the beginning of thought. External language becomes internalised into consciousness and thought. Hence sensitive social partners who are aware of what children can do and understand are needed for development to occur. A caring, warm relationship is important so that teachers can effectively share children's frame

of reference. In order to stimulate the maturing aspects of the child's mind teachers must initially provide extensive scaffolding to encourage children to learn. This is gradually withdrawn as children become able to be independent. This theoretical framework challenges a laissez-faire free play curriculum and suggests that teachers need to take an active role in stimulating learning. This does not mean formal academic teaching. Models of effective teaching in the zone of proximal development are provided by responsive parents. Many early childhood teachers could benefit from developing such techniques.

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